

Safe Routes to School Travel Plan Task Force – Meeting Minutes: 22 January 2013 (Page 1)

In attendance: Tracy Bull (Chair), Katie Cleasby, Bill Cummings, Peter Flood, Principal Marsha McGill, Assistant Principal Jay Gratton, Leslie Rothman, Sarah Ruffell (3:45pm), Matt Waitkins (NPRC)

Members Excused: Principal Emilie Carter, Katie Cleasby (4:10pm), John Fabrizio, Rick Greenier, Officer Rob Kelleher

The meeting was called to order by committee Chair Tracy Bull at 3:35pm. She welcomed the committee members, along with MES Assistant Principal Jay Gratton, sitting in for Principal Emilie Carter.

Mrs. Bull requested any corrections or clarifications to the draft meeting minutes from September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2012. She offered the following corrections:

--Change Emilie "Custer" to Emilie "Carter" under those listed in attendance

--Under Item #1, add a colon after "Introductions" and eliminate the parenthesis

--Under Item #4, in the first line, eliminate the space appearing in the word "and" between the "n" and the "d"

--Under Item #4, on both bulleted items under JMES and JMUES student surveys referencing carpool data, eliminate the space between % and carpool, and instead add a "/" for consistency with the other enumerated statistics

--Following Item #7, add the notation that the October meeting was subsequently rescheduled to November 20<sup>th</sup>.

Including the above amendments, final approval of the minutes passed with a vote of 5-0-2, with Mrs. Bull and Mr. Gratton abstaining.

Mrs. Bull requested any corrections or clarifications to the draft meeting minutes from November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Seeing none, final approval of the minutes were put to a vote and passed 5-0-3, with Mr. Cummings, Mr. Gratton and Mr. Waitkins abstaining.

Mrs. Bull reviewed the status of the project grant, explaining that the required scoping meeting had been held in Concord at the NH DOT on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2012, which she attended along with Mr. Flood and School District Business Administrator, Matt Shevenell. The meeting was conducted by the NH Safe Routes program coordinator, John Corrigan, allowing everyone gathered to review the project's scope, budget and timetable. Mrs. Bull also noted that the

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scoping meeting served to formally commence the project within the required three month timeframe as noted in the Local Agreement under Section III, Part D.

Mrs. Bull further explained that it has become necessary for the person administering the paperwork and fiscal aspect of the grant to receive training and certification for the Local Public Agency (LPA) manual; a document of nearly 500 pages. Since Mr. Shevenell was intended to handle that aspect for the School District, he will need to undertake the training when it becomes available again in May 2013. In the interim, the NH DOT has agreed to allow Kyle Fox, Deputy Director of Merrimack Public Works, to serve as the “Person in Responsible Charge” (PRC), overseeing and assisting Mr. Shevenell, since he already holds LPA certification. In order to formalize this arrangement, the NH DOT requested the issuance of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Town and School District. Mrs. Bull noted that this was presented before and the MOU granted by the Town Council on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Prior to the committee meeting, Mrs. Bull had distributed a copy of the project timetable to committee members as it was presented during the scoping meeting. She explained that the next step in the process would be receipt of a “notice to proceed” with the bidding process which will allow the committee to formally contract with the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) for the work under the budgetary terms in the approved grant. Although approved, the funds must be formally released by the government in order for that notice to be issued. Therefore the timetable will be subject to some shifting out into the months ahead to accommodate that part of the process taking place, but the tasks outlined within the timetable would otherwise remain the same. Following the bidding process and contract approval, a final “notice to proceed” will be issued by the NH DOT, and the body of work can then commence as outlined in the timetable.

Mrs. Bull opened the discussion up to any questions regarding the timetable. Seeing none, Mr. Waitkins commented that despite any calendar changes to the timetable, the travel plan project and report is still expected to be complete in time to allow for submission of a grant application to the 7<sup>th</sup> and final round of Safe Routes to School infrastructure funding. That round of funding (affording up to \$250,000 of reimbursement) is expected to commence in the late summer or early fall of 2013.

As announced at the November meeting, during November 2012, Mr. Waitkins arranged for and set up a phase of traffic counts on roads surrounding and most germane to the Masticola Complex: Baboosic Lake Road (2 points, one east and one west of the complex), O’Gara Drive, McElwain Street, Woodbury Street, Bishop Street, School Street. Mrs. Bull noted the generosity of the NRPC in undertaking this work in anticipation of the travel plan grant work, inviting Mr. Waitkins to distribute and describe the data collected and complied. He offered to further distribute the information being handed out via email.

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Mr. Waitkins explained the devices used were air pulse traffic counting machines which record data as vehicles travel over them. He noted that they must be used in fair weather so as not to incur damage from plows, etc., in the event of snow, which factored into his decision to conduct the counts sooner rather than later. The machines remained in place for one week, recording data from midday on a Tuesday through the following Tuesday.

Mr. Waitkins described the nature of the data contained in the spread sheets, which show directional volume by the hour for each of the seven locations where machines were placed. The map demonstrates the various locations and offers overall percentile breakdowns of traffic speed averages across the week. Mr. Waitkins explained these documents offer one way to look at the data gathered, but there are plenty of other ways to view and interpret the information, such as by specific day, by different time periods or targeted times of day, etc. As work progresses, the committee may decide how best to avail the information.

Committee members engaged in conversation regarding the data as presented, making several notable observations, including:

- On Baboosic Lake Road, traffic speed averages are influenced by the marked and lighted school zone, which limits speed to 20 MPH during targeted school arrival and dismissal times on week days. Traffic volume also slows speed down considerably during the morning commute, sometimes to a standstill at points when mixed with traffic heading to Merrimack High School (MHS), particularly eastbound over the bridge which spans the Everitt Turnpike.

- Traffic does not back up to the same degree on Baboosic Lake Road during the time period when vehicles are arriving at the Masticola Complex.

- Traffic volume and speed on School Street is largely dictated by those vehicles accessing and departing JMUES. Mrs. McGill noted the volume around 5pm, a time of day when many residents are availing the building for purposes of non-school related activities as well as sports.

- Traffic volume and speed on Bishop Street is largely influenced by vehicles (particularly school busses) accessing and departing MES. They are also tempered by the relative narrowness of the street, often preventing the two-way flow of traffic. The street also has no sidewalks on either side.

- Posted signs at the juncture of McElwain Street and Woodbury Street restrict traffic flow north on from 2pm-3pm on McElwain Street, but are often not observed. This may require additional enforcement.

- Additional traffic enforcement issues exist in Connell's Plaza, often used as a cut-through from Woodbury Street, and in the form of poor traffic patterns and unauthorized parking along the unimproved west side of O'Gara Drive, across from the Masticola Complex.

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Mrs. Bull opened discussion to the topic of Bike to School Day, scheduled for May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013. She noted that while Mr. Greenier has successfully guided participation in Walk to School Day for the past 8 years at JMUES, Bike to School Day has not previously been observed in an organized manner at the Masticola Complex. Given the committee's anticipated body of work, this year's upcoming date could provide an opportunity to begin doing so on some level, while simultaneously building awareness and interest in the Safe Routes to School program and travel plan project being undertaken. She further noted that May is Bicycle Safety Awareness Month. Mr. Waitkins commented that this phase of the Safe Routes program is all about gauging interest, noting that commonly when students and families are polled about their opinions as to whether or not walking and biking to school are fun activities and healthy options, the answer is frequently affirmative. Mrs. McGill shared her awareness that Mr. Greenier has expressed interest in organizing something for JMUES. Mrs. Rothman stated she has several ideas to share as well.

Further discussion included the notion that any observance this year could begin small and then grow in subsequent years, may well take different forms at MES and JMUES, could be integrated to some degree into Physical Education classes within the buildings, perhaps involve the assistance of volunteers and/or parent/teacher groups, the Merrimack Police Department, the Girl Scout Troop who attended the November meeting, etc.

It was also noted that there would be obstacles to overcome, given the fact that bicycle equipment would be involved. Because some students would be coming from homes located too far from school to reasonably ride, there would need to be some organized approach to drop-off and pick-up of students bringing bicycles, but not actually riding them to school. Bearing that in mind, Mrs. Bull pointed out that because some students inherently live too far to walk or bike to the Masticola Complex, it would be all the more beneficial to complete sidewalk on the unimproved portion of O'Gara Drive, which would then create a continuous loop around the complex and up to MHS. The area could then be safely availed by Physical Education classes at each building level (and already is used to some degree at MHS). This could further lend itself to other creative alternatives, such as walking and biking clubs, etc., also supported by the Safe Routes program.

It was agreed that Mrs. Bull would contact all committee members via email, asking they forward her their ideas and suggestions towards participating this May, which she will compile into one document, then distribute to all members for further discussion during the February meeting.

Mrs. Bull opened the floor to comments from committee members.

Mr. Cummings inquired as to bicycle parking accommodations at MES and JMUES. Mrs. McGill explained that there are bike racks available for use at JMUES adjacent to the area near the

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Smith Gym. Mr. Gratton explained that there is also a bike rack at MES near the main entrance to the school.

In preparation for the next committee meeting, Mrs. Bull explained that the third Tuesday in February would fall on the 19<sup>th</sup>, noting that the subsequent week would be Winter Break for the School District. With committee members agreeable to that date at 3:30pm, Mrs. McGill offered to reserve JMUES Room #121 for the meeting, noting that the previously availed meeting space, JMUES Room #122, had become otherwise committed for the foreseeable future, therefore Room #121 will become the committee's new meeting space.

Mrs. Bull thanked committee members for their attendance, and the meeting was adjourned at 4:30pm.